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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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SUBJECT Assessment of Casey's Reign at the CIA

SCOTT SIMON: Democrats in the House of Representatives this week introduced legislation that would strengthen congressional oversight of the Central Intelligence Agency's covert activities. Also this week, the Director of the CIA, William Casey, announced his resignation. Mr. Casey is still recovering from surgery that removed a cancerous tumor from his brain.

Weekend Edition Washington correspondent Daniel Schorr discusses the impact of Mr. Casey's six years as head of the CIA with two veterans of that agency.

DANIEL SCHORR: Casey was one of the most political and most controversial heads of the CIA in its four decades. He was frequently in trouble with Congress mainly over his penchant for covert operations and a reluctance to keep Congress posted on them. But some intelligence professionals give him high marks. Among them, William Colby, the CIA Director in the '70s, and George Carver, the agency's former Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence.

First, Colby.

WILLIAM COLBY: I give him a big plus. I give him a big plus for two reasons. I think he lifted the agency up from the dull days of the mid '70s and late '70s when it really was very much frowned upon, subject to a great deal of criticism and hysteria. And I think he lifted it up and put it back to work.

SCHORR: Plus? Minus?

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GEORGE CARVER: Well, I share that. I give him a very large net plus. There were a few things on the other side of the ledger. He had more strain in his relations with Congress than any prudent DCI should have tried to have. But I think he did an enormous amount to rebuild the analytic core and to strengthen its contribution. And he did a great deal to refurbish morale within the operations directorate and to clear up some of the residual legacies of the time of troubles of the mid '70s and the difficulties of the Carter years.

So I think, on the whole, Bill will be long remembered, certainly within the intelligence community, and I think increasingly over the years outside of it, as having been a very splendid Director, indeed.

SCHORR: Casey's name has been linked to operations in Afghanistan, Angola, Libya, Cambodia and Nicaragua, including the mining of its harbors. He has also been linked, at least marginally, to the Iranian arms deal.

I asked Colby whether Casey had taken too many risks.

COLBY: You're not going to be a successful Director if you're not willing to take risks. That means you have to be a risk taker. There's no question about it. If you set up a nice, quiet, little bureaucrat, nothing's going to happen: absolutely nothing; nothing bad, but nothing good either.

Now on recent events, you'll notice that everything that the agency was told to do, the political levels of our government told it to do, including not tell the Congress about the Iranian arms actions.

CARVER: Bill's touched on a very important point. No Director that I'm aware of has ever gone off and free-wheeled. Every action taken by the agency since it came into existence with the National Security Act of 1947 has been taken on the direction of higher political authority in the White House, or on Capitol Hill, or both, of people who were authorized to give those instructions. Some of them later denied it or forgot that they ever gave them. But that's a different problem. And I think that Bill Casey -- one reason, Dan, as to, with all due respect, why Bill and I have a somewhat different perception than many on the outside is we happen to know a little bit more about it and happen to be a little bit closer to what the facts are. And frequently people will charge that, oh, I was never briefed: I never knew anything, when, in point of fact, they'd been briefed in great deal.

And Bill Casey should have paid more attention to some of the atmospherics of his congressional relations, particularly

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in his first few years, than he did. This is a 20/20 hindsight judgment that was felt by some of my colleagues at the time. But Bill is a very tough, combative Irishman who does not take criticism all that well and is convinced that he knows what he's doing, and with people who disagree with him he tends to be a might truculent, and that sometimes is not the way to win friends and influence people on Capitol Hill.

SCHORR: It's been a tradition to choose directors with a background in operations. But the new director, Robert Gates, who was Casey's deputy, comes from the intelligence gathering side. And I asked Colby if that would mean a change in emphasis.

COLBY: Oh, I think it's a mark of the success of Casey's reorganization that the analysts have finally come into their own. And one of the problems for years was that the analysts were second to the operators. No question about it. Part of that, I think, was an organizational problem. But the nomination of Gates means that, really, we've gone to what central intelligence is all about, that the analyst is at the center of CIA. He's the key to the whole process.

CARVER: The operator provides grist for the analyst's mill, but it's the analyst's conclusions that makes intelligence worthwhile for the policy-maker. And for a long time, as Bill said, analysis was regarded within the culture of the CIA as something of a stepchild. And Bill Casey rectified that, and that rectification was, I think, one of his greatest achievements.

SCHORR: Do covert operations have to be redefined for what we're doing today in Angola, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and elsewhere?

COLBY: Absolutely not. Covert operations are going to reflect the policy of an administration. If you have an administration that doesn't want a very activist foreign policy, a very activist effort around the world with our friends and enemies, and so forth, fine, there won't be very many. If you have an administration that makes no secret of its sympathy for the contras and its concern over the necessity to aid the Afghan mujahedeen, and so forth, then you'll have more covert action. It's a pure policy thing at the top, amply signalled by the basic policies of the administration.

CARVER: And there there was a sea change. During the Carter years, there was a widespread feeling in the upper echelons of the administration that a vigorous defense of American interests and defense of our allies, particularly those who were beleaguered, was somehow vaguely immoral. This is a view that Reagan and his colleagues, who were so elected by the

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population of the United States, never shared. And, as Bill said, when you get an activist President, you're going to have an activist intelligence community.

But this is another thing you've got to remember, Dan. Covert action is always a supplement to policy. It's not a substitute for policy. And when properly used, it provides a very valuable support for implementing a decision that has to be primarily implemented by the normal channels of diplomacy or military negotiation, or whatever.

COLBY: But the recent Iranian situation clearly shows the problems you get into when you have an open policy saying no arms to Iran, and then you get caught shipping arms secretly to Iran. Obviously it's totally contradictory. And it's going to get you into deep trouble.

CARVER: And if the White House really had wanted to pursue a quiet policy that was somewhat at variance with its public position, it would have been far better advised to have used the institutional machinery that was set up for carrying out precisely such actions, such as the CIA, than to try to free-wheel it out of the NSA staff, which was never set up to run operations at all and whenever it's tried to do so, disaster has resulted.

SCHORR: What's going to be different now, both in that Casey's gone, we've learned an awful lot from the Iranian-contra experience. The CIA must have learned a lot. We've all learned a lot.

What's going to change?

COLBY: Well, I think you're going to have the result of these investigations come out at the end of the year, in October, whenever they finish. And it will show that, yes, the CIA did help on the Iranian arms transactions. Yes, it operated under presidential directive and in accordance with findings. And included in the finding was don't tell the Congress for now.

Now "for now" going on for 18 months, is an awful long time. And I'm sure there'll be some very tough discussions as to whether that could repeat itself again.

But other than that, I think you'll find that, on the Iranian side, the agency operated under direction, and, under the contra side, that it essentially kept itself clean of that whole operation. You may find one or two fingerprints slightly over the edge here and there. But substantial involvement? I don't think you'll find it.

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So you'll have a review of the relationship with the congressional committees, probably some assurances on both sides that they'll be more serious, that the Congress will be more serious about keeping the secrets, the administration will be serious about keeping them decently informed.

SCHORR: There is a tendency among intelligence professionals to reduce the traumas of their agency to problems of damage control. In the mid 1970's, the CIA was hung out to dry in post-Watergate congressional investigations, but it hunkered down and it recovered. And now because of the Iran and contra operations, it faces more trouble. But veterans seem sure that, under Gates, it will again recover.

This is Daniel Schorr.